Tibetan Refugee Issues in Nepali Press

Subash Acharya

Abstract

This article analyses the coverage of Tibetan refugee issues in Nepali media, with special reference to the Nepali national daily newspapers *Gorkhapatra, Kantipur* and *Annapurna Post*, using quantitative and qualitative content analysis methods. It examines the coverage, understanding and impact of the Tibetan refugee issues on Nepali media and vice versa. The research analyses that Nepal's geopolitical location and the trouble spot of Nepal's neighbour, the rising supreme power China, has significant impacts on Nepal's national interest. The research has found that Nepali media does not show uniform face on the coverage of Tibetan issues. The government owned media gives a very limited space to Tibetan issues and gives priority to the government's policies and activities, whereas Nepali private media gives adequate space to both both domestic and international news.

1. Introduction

Nepal and China share 111,147 kilometers long common borders along the length of the Himalayan ranges with difficult terrain adjoining the TAR. The issue of Tibet creates a sensitive environment for Nepal-China relations although having a long relation in the history. Nepal's foreign policy regarding China is based on the principles of 'Panchsheel' and 'One China Policy'. Upholding the belief that Tibet and Taiwan are part of China and remains adamant that Nepali territory should not be used for Tibetan protests against China by any elements in any figure (Prajapati, 2011, p.10).

After the unsuccessful uprising on 10 March 1959, the Dalai Lama took refuge in India. Following this event, about eighty thousand Tibetans took refuge in India and about ten thousand in Nepal. Many Tibetans also took refuge in other countries including Bhutan. Nepal is the first country of entry to provide asylum for them.

The exodus of the Tibetan refugees in such a large number in the late 1950s and early 1960s attracted the attention of several international agencies,

including the UNHCR, Nepal Red Cross and the governments of different countries of the world. The refugees were given financial and material support to settle in the countries where they took refuge (NUCRA, 2003/ TRWO, 1999).

Nepal stopped officially accepting new Tibetan refugees in December 31, 1989, and since then no Tibetans are allowed to stay Nepal legally. Every year more than 500 Tibetans enter Nepali border illegally. In order to address the increasing volume of Tibetan refugees in Nepal, an informal 'Gentlemen's Agreement' was signed between the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights (UNHCR) in Nepal and the Nepali government in 1989 under the auspices of the US Embassy.

The Tibetan refugee crisis is an issue which highlights Nepal's vulnerability to foreign interference which also raises a range of sensitive conceptual security and foreign policy debates in Nepal that cannot be easily resolved. The country is caught between addressing its 'national security' challenges relating to Tibetan refugees, while adhering to its 'human rights' obligation of safeguarding refugee rights. Regarding these circumstances, study of the coverage of Tibetan refugee issues in Nepali press will help us understand their status in Nepal.

The influx of Tibetan refugees in a large number in Nepal took place in the second half of the 20th century. The first one occurred in 1959 when several thousand Tibetans escaped into Nepal after abortive Tibetan uprising in Lhasa. From the late 1960s to the mid-1980s, the border between Nepal and Tibet was closed, although every year a few Tibetans still managed to cross into Nepal. The border was opened again in 1985, mostly to promote tourism, but was closed again after large scale demonstrations broke out in Tibet in 1989 against Chinese rule, and the Chinese government imposed martial law in Tibet. The border reopened in 1989 and a steady flow of tourist, business people and refugees have traversed the border into Nepal ever since (Lostumbo, 1995). The Tibetans entering Nepal from Tibet without valid travel documents are considered illegal migrants by the Nepali Government (Lostumbo, 1995).

The International Committee of Red Cross (ICRC) was the first international agency who came to help Tibetan refugee in Nepal in 1959. In early 1965, the UNHCR came to Nepal and funded the purchase of land and housing projects at Jawalakhel, Swyambu, Chhorepatan, Hanja, Chairog, Dhorpatan, Rasuwa, Taplejung, Chailsa and other places in the kingdom for the resettlement of Tibetan refugees with the help and cooperation of Nepal Red Cross Society and His Majesty's government of Nepal. The UNHCR reduced its presence since 1973 for a few years but it was enlarged and again became active after

the arrival of large number of Bhutanese refugees in the late 1980s.

According to Nepali Home Ministry's National unit for Coordination of Refugee Affairs (NUCRA), as of April 2003, of the 12,540 Tibetan refugees living in Nepal, 10,766 have been issued Refugee Cards. Now on the basis of some reliable media publications, this number has increased to around 20,000. From my personal communication with certain exile Tibetan authorities secretly, I get data about the current population of Tibetan with or without RC. Of the total 13,465 Tibetans living legally, 1,614 males and 1,931 females hold RC; 3,478 males and 3,956 females above the age of 16, and 1,318 males and 1,168 females below 16 years old are without RC. This data shows that 3,545 Tibetan refugees are RC holders and 9,920 do not have RCs. This data clearly shows the identity problems of the authorized Tibetans in Nepal.

According to the Tibetan demography survey in exile done in 2009 (TDS), the total population of the Tibetan refugees residing in the territory of Nepal is 13,514 - male 6,543 and female 6,971. According to the same source, there are altogether 3,265 Tibetan households in Nepal, of which 3,083 are normal households and 182 households consist of institutional households such as schools, monasteries, institutions, and elder homes. According to the similar demography survey done in 1998, the total population of the Tibetans in Nepal is 12,224, with male population 6,319 and female population 5,905.

This data did not include non-authorized Tibetan population. Taking advantage of Nepal-India open border, a large number of non-authorized Tibetan population reside in Nepal. Nepal's support to the Tibetan refugees with limited resources is appreciated by the world community even today. The Tibetan refugees settled in 21 districts of Nepal in managed camps. The following data will show more details about them.

Nepal is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention or 1967 Protocol and does not have a domestic refugee legislation despite hosting a large number of refugees and asylum seekers. Perhaps Nepal is next to India in accommodating a very large number of Tibetan refugees. Tibetan refugee population in Nepal comes next to Bhutanese refugees, whose population in Nepal is more than one hundred thousand. At preset, about sixty thousand Bhutanese are resettled in third countries including the USA and Weestern countries. The foreign policy of Nepal is based on the Panchasheela Agreement which includes the provision 'One China' policy in terms of Sino-Nepal relations. All types of political flavored activities against China are strictly prohibited on the soil of Nepal. Under such circumstances the Tibetan refugees are facing many problems that affect thier daily life.

- According to Nepali Home Ministry's National Unit for Coordination of Refugee affairs (NUCRA), as of April 2003, of

the 12,540 Tibetan refugees living in Nepal, 10,766 have been issued Refugee Cards. Now on the basis of some reliable media publications this number has increased to 20,000. Based on this statistic, 50% of the Tibetan refugees do not have refugee cards. The Nepali Government discontinued the practice of issuing refugee cards in 1989. Tibetan children born in Nepal after 1989 and those who had not got RCs before the said date are today undocumented people. Due to this, they are not able to produce any ID to any government officials when required and they are not able to obtain even driving licenses, travel documents and other basic facilities and rights.

- RC holders are allowed simply to stay in Nepal legally. It does not give right of livelihood individually and even registration of social organizations as a community. They are denied rights to participate in local social activities and contribute to the wellbeing of the society. The Government of Nepal needs to think to issue necessary notifications to allow the RC holders the benefit of registration of non-political and non-profit social organizations.

- Tibetan refugees in Nepal have to frequently crossover to India for the purposes of medical treatment, study, pilgrimage and so on. In the absence of citizenship of both the countries, they continue to face difficulties to travel through airways.

- There are a large number of Tibetans born and brought up in Nepal. Many skilled and qualified youths remain unemployed even today. The RC only allows them to stay in Nepal legally without any strong opportunities of employment. Such a treatment to RC holder is not only stopping them from contributing to the social and economic fabrics of the country but it is a waste of precious human resources and thus a burden to the society. This valuable resource needs to be used for the construction of the country. Many youth are suffering from frustration and becoming drug addicts which will hinder the social development. It is duty of GON to protect their future.

- For a long time, Tibetan refugees have been allowed to observe/ celebrate religious festivals and cultural traditions without obstructions. During the past few years many restrictions were

imposed on even simple religious festivals. It is a well-known fact that these restrictions have not only harmed the Tibetan refugees but affected adversely all the non-Nepali people of Himalayan region of Nepal including Sherpas, Bhota and Lamas who share the same buddhist culture with the Tibetans. The GON must sincerely protect the cultural rights of citizens and refugees.

- The organizations related to refugee camps such as health clinics, old-age homes, orphanages and other community organizations are not allowed to open bank accounts, and accounts have to be opened in individual names which creates many complications including personal tax. The government of Nepal needs to allow opening of bank accounts in the names of offices with social and public importance.

- Registration of birth, marriage and death is not allowed for the Tibetan refugees. The system of writing names of children below 18 years on the RCs of the parents existed till 1994 which was also discontinued. It will cause unnecessary problems to both the GON and the Tibetan communities in near future.

- Lands allotted for the purpose of settlement of Tibetan refugees by the Government of Nepal before 50 years are now slowly encroached by various local individuals and organizations and some have been even destroyed by natural calamities. The Nepali government needs to conduct a proper survey of the lands allotted to the Tibetan refugees and protects these lands in order to prevent local people or organizations from encroaching and from natural disasters.

The Tibetan community issues are the main attracted issues for westerners. According to the UN Universal Periodic Review (UPR) report, which is Nepal's first ever UPR of human rights situations in the Human Rights Council, also suggests Nepal to take measures regarding the refugee situations. Many of the participant countries have suggested Nepal to ratify the convention of status of Refugee Rights whereas the US has recommended the Nepal government to refrain from forcibly deporting Tibetan asylum seekers to Tibet.

Certain sections of the Tibetan refugees have established maritial relations with the Nepali and by virtue of that they have received Nepali citizenship. Tibetan refugees are not burden to the Nepali society. On the contrary, they are asset. They have made contributions to the educational, economic and

cultural development of the nation. The carpet industry introduced by the Tibetan refugees has become a trademark of Nepal. Therefore, the relationship between the people of Nepal and the Tibetan community in Nepal over the past three decades has remained very cordial. The Tibetan community in Nepal organises the following political functions every year: Tibetan National Uprising Day on 10 March, Birthday of the Dalai Lama on 6 July, Tibetan Democracy Day on 2 September, and Commemoration of Awarding the Nobel Peace Prize to the Dalai Lama on 10 December.

1.1. Theoretical Framework

Theoretical framework is itself a search of theories where in the researcher can fit his or her research work. This study is undertaken to understand and measure the coverage of the Tibetan refugee issues in Nepali media. A single theory is not enough to cover the whole process of communicating this sensible issue. The foreign policy of Nepal is the determining factor while covering the refugee issues. Some schools of thoughts also developed regarding Nepal's foreign policy's influence on media. The Tibetan refugees in Nepal are not freely expressing their views to media as they are afraid to contradict the dominant views. The spiral of silence theory is suited in terms of the Tibetan community.

1.1.1. Influence of Foreign Policy on Media

The relationship between media and foreign policy is the degree of mutual influence. Different scholars have differnt views regarding whether foreign policy influences media or media influences foreign policy. These argument have been researched and debated over times but "the issue remains undecided" (Malek and Weigand 1997, p.21).

This research focuses on the influence of the foreign policy on media in the context of Tibetan issue in Nepal. Primarily, on the basis of some interviews with the agenda setters of Nepali media, it is clear that Nepali media is greatly influenced by 'One China' foreign policy. This research does not take into account other sectors of Nepal's foreign policy. The foreign policy of Nepal regarding its northern neighbour China has consistently remained stable since it officially started diplomatic relations with China. The mainstream Nepali media shows uniform face while covering the Tibet issues.

Malek and Wiegand (1997) in their chapter "News Media and Foreign Policy: An integrated Review" have explained that media influence can of three kinds - active, passive and neutral. Explaining the researches conducted by different scholars, they have pointed out that media plays a highly active role in influencing decisions made in the foreign policy arena, where media

is viewed as watchdog and an independent observer. Some scholars view media as a pawn in the political game, where media serves as an instrument in the actual implementation of foreign policy. Similarly, the third aspect of media influence is that neither media nor the government or political force is manipulative, as they do not work together to manipulate public opinion (Malek and Wiegand 1997, p.4).

Prof. Parsuram Kharel, Head of Department of Mass Communication and Journalism at Tribhuvan University of Nepal, argues that the role of media should be to promote national interest as an ultimate goal. "For pluralism, competing thoughts and the diversity in the media contribute to greater participation by different sections of society, which in turn helps create social harmony and, with it, promote Nepal's interest first and foremost."(Kharel, 2009, p.102)

Tanka Upreti, lecturer at the Department of Mass Communication and Journalism, argues that "Nepali media does not cover this issue professionally as it is influenced by the National interest and foreign policy."

Prakash Babu Poudyal, Secretary of China Study Centre and President of Capital FM, argues that Nepali media cannot go against the national interest and foreign policy of Nepal. "Tibet issue is touched with foreign policy of Nepal, popularly termed as 'One China' policy. We can't support the 'Free Tibet Movement' in the name of media freedom. Nepal has good relations with its northern neighbour China since historical period. Writing against the 'One China' policy is against our national interest, which will definitely create disputes in our traditional relationship. It is the primary duty of every media to protect their national interest."

1.1.2. Why do not Tibetans speak? Theory of 'Spiral of Silence'

Let us discuss the Tibetan representation of voice in Nepali media. Many Tibetans are not satisfied with the information disseminated by Nepali media. They feel lack of free comment. Not only in print media, in other forms of media too, their participation is finger countable number. I interviewed several Tibetans who told me, "We feel very unsafe to express our opinion in Nepali media. We could be accused of being anti-Chinese activists. Nepali media itself will not provide proper space to our views, and in the name of the foreign policy our information and news are distorted. We are compelled to keep silence." This research concludes with some proofs that Tibetans are afraid to express their opinion. This type of silence is theorized as Spiral of Silence theory.

A somewhat more controversial theory of media and public opinion is the concept of the Spiral of Silence. The concept of the 'Spiral of Silence' was

derived from a larger body of theory of popular opinion that was developed and tested by Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann over a number of years. In the words of its originator, "observations made in one context (the mass media) spread to another and encourage people either to proclaim their views or to swallow them and keep quiet until, in a spiraling process, one view dominate the public scene and the other disappears from public awareness as it its adherents become mute. This is the process that can be called a 'Spiral of Silence' (Noelle, 1984 p. 5). In other words, "because of people's fear of isolation or separation from those around them, they tend to keep their attitudes to themselves when they think they are in the minority. The media, because of a variety of factors, tend to present one (or at most two) side of an issue to the exclusion of others, which further encourages those people to keep quiet and makes it even tougher for the media to uncover and register that opposing viewpoint" (Baran & Devis, 2009, p. 321).

In an essay critical of Spiral of Silence theory, Elihu katz summarized Noelle Neumann's thinking in this way:

1. Individuals have opinions;
2. Fearing isolation, individuals do not express their opinions if they perceive themselves unsupported by others;
3. A "quasi-statistical sense" is employed by individuals to scan the environments for signs of support;
4. Mass media constitutes a major source of information for the distribution of opinions, and thus creates climate of support/nonsupport;
5. Other sources of information do the same;
6. The media tends to speak in one voice, almost monopolistically;
7. The media tends to distort the proper distribution of opinions in society and spread biased information through reporters;
8. Perceiving themselves unsupported, groups or individuals–who may, at times, even constitute a majority–lose confidence and withdraw from public debate, thus speeding the demise of their position through the self-fulfilling spiral of silence. They may not change their own minds, but they stop recruitment of others and abandon the fight; and
9. Society is manipulated and impoverished thereby. (Baran & Devis, 2009, p. 322).

Noelle Neumann does not focus on micro-level conceptualizations of how average people come to perceive the public agenda; she is rather concerned with the macro level long term consequences of such perceptions.

Looking at the demonstrative activities of the Tibetans in Nepal, its seems that they do not remain silence. This research only focuses on the authentic

Tibetan refugees living in the territory of Nepal. In fact, the Tibetans in Nepal remain silent. In most of the demonstrations and protest organized by the Tibetan refugees, youth are hired from India. As Nepal-India have open border, the documented refugees from India easily enter Nepal and reach Kathmandu to participate in functions. So the GON itself do not know the actual data of Tibetan refugees residing in Nepal. Mostly the problmes are created by Tibetans who have recently arrived from Tibet. Let us take a few examples. Recently, the ekantipur.com online news published news regarding the self-immolation of a Tibetan monk at Boudha. The Tibetan activist had made a plan of 100th Tibetan self-immolation in Nepal. He tried it before but could not succeed. Originally the monk named Thundup Dopchen who burnt himself was not an authentic Tibetan refugee found in the record of the GON. He just escaped from Tibet before a month and illegally staying at Boudha area. This also indicates the Tibetans who got the refugee status in Nepal are not commonly participating in sensitive protest campaigns.

A Tibetan monk set himself on fire in an apparent protest against Chinese rule in Tibet on the premise of the Boudhanath Stupa in the capital. In his early 20s, the man identified as Thundup Dopchen became the 100th Tibetan to try self-immolation in protest. The Nepal police spokesman Keshav Adhikari said they had conducted preliminary investigations and were waiting for the family to identify the body for post-mortem. The police suspect that Dopchen travelled all the way from India specifically for the purpose. The last known attempt at self-immolation in Kathmandu was made on November 10, 2011 by a monk in the same area. He survived with minor injuries.

Let's take another example of illegal entrance of Tibetans from India and functioning the anti-Chinese activities. The court of Nepal sentenced Tsetan Dorjee for illegally entering Nepal, who was on a march back Tibet through Nepal. In an unexpected ruling, a court in Nepal today has sentenced Tsetan Dorjee to five years, five months, and 25 days in prison for illegally entering Nepal. "If I die under the Chinese gun at the border, my message to all Tibetans is to be united in our struggle," Dorjee had told the phayul.com before beginning his march. "As Tibetans in Tibet keep burning themselves for a free Tibet, it is our responsibility to be united and stand together for Tibet," Dorjee said. "It is time to be a Tibetan for Tibet, not just for one's own family."

This example shows that Nepal is a target place for Tibetan freedom movement as it is geopolitically located in the cordial position for such campaign. Protesters organize various anti-Chinese activities against the foreign policy of Nepal. Here we need to understand that commonly the refugees in the concerned camps of Nepal worry about their future and

children rather than participating in the functions. It is therefore clear that because of fear of arrest and imprisonment, Tibetans in Nepal do not express their opinions. Whatever is happening on the soil of Nepal is cultivated by external factors.

2. Nepal and Legal Provision Related to Refugees

2.1. Nepal and legal provision related to aliens

Nepal is one of the finger countable old countries in the world, and so is its history of refugee protection. Nepal-Tibet have historical relations of war and friendship. Tibetans sought asylum in Nepal not only after 1959, Shamar Rinpoche, a high ranking religous leader in Tibet, along with his retinue, sought asylum in Nepal in 1845. Similarly, King Narendradeva of Nepal took refuge in Tibet (Manandhar, 2041, p. 3). These incidents show that before adaptation of refugee ideology, both the nations protected the rights of vulnerable people. Now the situation has changed and collective efforts are carried out for the identity, uniformity and protection of the rights of refugees.

Nepal is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention or its 1967 protocol, nor does it have any domestic legislation relating to the protection of refugees. Regardless of ratification, however, all the governments are bound to respect the fundamental human rights of refugees as well as the aspects of refugee, humanitarian and human rights law which have achieved the status of customary international law. Nepal is actively participating in development and promotion of human rights, humanitarian values, and norms since she joined the UN on 14th December 1955.

Nepal has given shelter to refugees on humanitarian grounds and upholds the principle of non-refoulment of refugees. Not to practice forcible repatriation is a moral obligation and has developed into a legal obligation derived from related rules of conventional and customary international law.

The Interim Constitution of Nepal is not direct related to refugees. However, the Article 35(21) states that the foreign policy of Nepal shall be based on principles of United Nations Charter, charters of Non-Aligned Nations, the principles of Panchsheel, international law, and norms of world peace. The fundamental rights according to the Interim Constitution of Nepal 2063 are pointed only towards citizens, but some of the rights which fall under fundamental rights provided as basic human rights to foreign people as well as refugees. The Interim Constitution of Nepal which provides some basic human rights to foreigners as well as refugees is as follows:

- Right to freedom: Article 12(1),(2)
- Right against untouchability and racial discrimination: Article 14(1-5)

Right regarding publication and broadcasting and press: Article 15 (1-4)

- Right Regarding Environment and Health: Article 16 (1)
- Right to Education and Culture: Article 17(1), (3)
- Right to women: Article 20 (1-4)
- Right to children: Article 22 (1-5)
- Right to religion: Article 23 (1-2)
- Right to Justice: Article 24 (1-10)
- Right Against Prevention of Detention: Article 25(1-2)
- Right Against Torture: Article 25 (1-2)
- Right to Privacy: Article 28
- Right Against Exploitation: Article 29 (1-4)
- Right to Constitutional Remedy: Article 32

Immigration Act of Nepal, 2049 in 2(b) defines aliens. Aliens are defined as persons who are not citizens of Nepal. There is no mention of refugee. Section 9 and 14(2) of the act deals with entry, stay and expulsion of aliens. Aliens can be expelled on the ground of national interest under 9 of the Act. Expulsion of aliens including that of refugee on the ground of national security and public order is universally recognized principles of International law.

Article 12 (1) of Extradition Act, 2045, the principle of not extradited of political offenders. This provision supports the philosophy of refugee law. The treaties Act, 2047/Citizenship Act, 2063 Article 34 are attracted somehow on the protection of refugee rights.

Honorable Supreme Court of Nepal under a joint bench of Justice Balram KC and Justice Sharda Prasad Pandit in the case of Pakistani national Usman Jabed, directed the Government on 24th September 2007 to be attentive to frame family laws relating to refugees, ratify the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its optional protocols (Khanal, 2069: pp. 30).

The legislation on 'Refugee Status and Protection Act, 2010' has already been drafted and submitted to the legislative body to pass. It is related to the status of determination and protection of refugees and to establish a national protection governance regime in compliance with norms, values and principles postulated in various international instruments on the protection of human safety, dignity and welfare of which Nepal is party and under the Constitutional and legal provision of Nepal.

Nepal's: Policy towards Refugee (Admin, 2011)

1. Nepal has a long track record of humanitarian approach to refugees. It has provided asylum to refugee since 1959. At present, Nepal has given asylum to more than 132,000 refugees, including 100,000 Bhutanese and

several thousand Tibetan refugees.

2. Although not a signatory to any international refugee conventions and therefore not bound by international legal obligations as such, Nepal has given shelter to refugees on humanitarian grounds. In view of her own socio-economic constrains and other limitations, Nepal's treatment of asylum seekers has earned appreciation from all over the world.
3. Nepal understands and respects the humanitarian and human rights issues of the asylum seekers. The asylum seekers are treated in Nepal in accordance with international norms, practices and standards.
4. Nepal fully cooperates with the UNHCR and allows the UNHCR in Kathmandu to assist the asylum seekers to be processed as refugees. Nepal appreciates the involvement of UNHCR and the international community in the refugee problems in the country
5. Aliens who declare their intention to seek asylum before the Nepali authorities are interrogated by the immigration authorities and the UNHCR is given access to them for their status determination. Such "Persons of Concern" are then processed accordingly through the UNHCR in accordance with the international norms and practices. The government of Nepal allows the processing of refugees by the UNHCR for resettlement to any third country.
6. Voluntariness has been an accepted principle for the treatment of refugees in Nepal. Only persons seeking voluntary return shall be repatriated in accordance with the international norms and practices. Nepal has a policy not to forcibly return refugees from its soil.
7. Nepal will uphold the principle of non-refoulment of refugees. Nepal will not forcibly return any asylum seekers from its soil.
8. Nepal will allow the UNHCR to verify and establish the status of people seeking asylum and will allow the UNHCR to process them without any hindrance.

3. Research Analysis

Quantitative Data Analysis

This research data is based on the first six months of January to June 2012.

Table A. Comparison of different refugees

Types of Refugee	Publication	Percentage (%)
Tibetan	29	47
Bhutanese	20	32
Others	8	13
General	5	8
Total	62	100

Table A indicates the comparison of refugee news in Nepali media. This data includes the news items covered by the selected media in the above cited time period about the Bhutanese refugees living in the territory of Nepal and also the international refugees. Altogether 62 news items about refugees were published. Among them 29 were related to Tibetans and 20 were to Bhutanese, 8 were related to refugees beyond the territory of Nepal and the rest 5 were related to general issues of refugee community. This also shows 47% or the major part of the published matters are concerned with Tibetans, 32% with Bhutanese, 13% with other refugees and the rest 8% are related to refugees in general. It indicates that Nepali media gives more coverage on the Tibetan refugee issues than Bhutanese refugee problems. It also indicates the low coverage of the international refugee issues in the Nepali media.

Table B. Distribution on coverage priority based on Territory (TR only)

Newspaper	Nepal	International	Total
Gorkhapatra	5	-	5
Kantipur	10	1	11
Annapurna Post	7	6	13
Total	22	7	29
Percentage (%)	76	24	100

Table B shows the coverage priority given by the newspapers in terms of the Tibetan refugee issues. This data does not include the issues related to Bhutanese and others refugees. It indicates that quantity of national issues and international issues of Tibetan refugees get space in the paper. It helps us know how the national and international incidents of the same issues get space in Nepali press through qualitative analysis.

According to the above data, 76% of the total Tibetan refugees issues published in Nepali newspapers cover national issues and the rest 24% pertains to international issues related to Tibetan refugees. This data also indicates that government owned media does not give any space to the international issues regarding Tibetan refugees.

Table C. Distribution of Coverage by Genres
(Includes Tibetan Refugees only)

Newspaper	News	News Analysis	Editorial	Opinion	Interview	Photo
Gorkhapatra	3	-	1	1	-	-
Kantipur	4	3	-	3	1	-
Annapurna post	8	2	1	-	-	2
Total	15	5	2	4	1	2
Percentage (%)	52	17	7	14	7	3

Table C shows that the coverage of the Tibetan issues in selected newspapers on the basis of genres. Among the 29 selected news items for the study, news hold the greater part 52% and news analysis 17%. The editorial and photo cover consume least spaces of 7 and 3 percent respectively. Opinions also gets adequate space in Nepali newspapers covering 14% of the total space of the publication. The table also shows that private media coverage is high in every genre. News analysis, interviews and photos do not get any space in the *Gorkhapatra*.

Private media gives importance to editorials, photographs, interviews, and opinions that belong to the genre of analytical nature where as government owned media gives little coverage to the same. It helps us understand that the government owned media gives priority to the soft and effective genre.

Qualitative Findings and Analysis

There are various perspectives among Nepali/Tibetan journalists on reporting Tibetan issues. Even both media sectors have no any clear cut written policy regarding the coverage. Both Nepali and Tibetan journalists cover the issues only in the news sense than the research based. Covering the issues of Tibetan refugees is directly linked with the foreign policy of Nepal. Nepali media give first priority to the foreign policy & national interest, but at the same time arguing the editorial freedom too. Some journalists have extreme view that media has no nation and they are free to cover the issues in their own way. This extreme view is not practical that it is against the principle of separation of powers. The absolute power makes any organs dictators.

Tibetan journalists are not recognized by the GON. Due to their unauthorized status, they are charged by Nepali security personals as anti-Chinese political activists in the news field. Their understanding in terms of covering refugee issues in the Nepali media is different. Tibetan journalist are aware of the media principles and ethics, and in terms of priority for the national interest they have also different views. There are hegemony effects on the third world. As Nepal also lies in the third world, news and information are commoditised. So there is no uniformity in the coverage of the issues.

Perspectives of the Nepali Journalists & Scholars

All the journalists that I interviewed consider the Tibetan cause as a crucial matter of reporting on Nepal-China affairs. The coverage of Tibetan issues is based on different factors. The journalists point out that the most important national interest in Nepal's policy towards China is bilateral security and territorial integrity, and the most important journalistic freedom is to continuously assert media's indigenous, autonomous and self-assessment

role towards this objective. They also have similar views towards Tibetan refugee as they popularly call it humanitarian and political issue. In most cases, they enjoy freedom to write, but covering the Tibetan protest become a major constrain.

It cannot be denied that Nepal clearly has a geo-political and strategic interest to appease China. Moreover, huge influx of Chinese tourists in Nepal provides valuable foreign exchange and Chinese multi-national companies to invest in infrastructure projects in Nepal. However, international relations are not just about a crude diplomacy in realist sense. In the twenty-first century, even small countries with no nuclear or military power can generate influence and power with its international image and credibility. In this circumstance Anurag Acharya, a well known columnist of *Nepali Times* & programme manager of Centre for Investigative Journalism, argues that "There are definite problems and challenges in reporting on Tibetan issue in Nepal, mostly due to government's overt and covert intimidation of media houses and journalists who report on forced /illegal detention of Tibetans. Besides, the community itself has been intimidated and persecuted to an extent that most of them are wary of talking to the media, fearing reprisal from the government. Also, there is a clear perception among the Tibetan community that the Nepali media has not been too kind to the refugees and has ignored their plight, citing that the issue is related to Nepal's 'national interest' vis-a-vis Chinese interest."

Tanka Upreti, lecturer on International Communication at the Department of Mass Communication and Journalism, points out that "Nepali media does not cover this issue professionally, as it influences the national interest and foreign policy."

Dr. Upendra Gautam, freelancer, has a different view regarding the coverage of Tibetan issues by Nepali media. He argues that almost information is sponsored by the western and colonial information sources. He says, "Mostly, it is from the western information sources. The Nepali media derives Tibetan news from foreign news sources. It does not use its indigenous, autonomous and self-assessment capability about the Tibetan affairs. It is mostly fed, cultivated and sponsored by the western and colonial information sources."

Bhairab Rishal, senior journalist, argues that "In the beginning Nepali community know Tibet more than modern China, popularly termed as Bhot. The media itself has no such policy on handling of foreign issues. Very limited information of international affairs was covered as Panchyat rule is against the free flow of information or pluralism. There are no such rules and regulations similar to codes of ethics for disciplined journalistic execise, but editors encourage news reporters and correspondents to cover the issues of national

interest. Even nowadays I believe that journalists are firstly the citizen of a nation, so their first duty is towards their national interest than editorial independence."

Majority of journalists are not paid for months. The minimum wage fixed by the GON is not sufficient to cover the daily needs of a journalist. Because of minimum wage and poor investment in media sector, there have been many reports of journalists being bribed by the embassies in Nepal. Journalists are reported to taken to tour by the embassies in Nepal. According to the editor of *Janaastha Weekly*, Kisor Shrestha and Prakash Babu Poudyal of CSC/Capital FM, at least 22 journalists from Nepal visit China every year at the invitation of China. They also confirm that arranging visits for journalists are even done by India and Western countries. Prakash Babu argues that "Chinese authority organizes visits for Nepali journalists to show the development made in Tibet and China rather than to influence them. These types of visit do not have any negative objectives. The Chinese want to show the developments they have made in Tibet. Whatever we assume about Tibet is quite different. People think that after the Dalai Lama fled from Tibet, all the Tibetan people left the country and there is no Tibetan population, human rights, educational/cultural institutions, etc., in Tibet. Tibet is another world today. Nepal can learn many more development practice from Tibet. This is a fruitful opportunity for news reporters. The Chinese want to show modern Tibet."

Perspectives of the Tibetan Journalists

A very few finger countable Tibetan journalists are actively carrying their journalism profession in Nepal. The RFA (Radio Free Asia) is the main media to coverage their issues in Nepal and abroad. Most of the reporters in Nepal belong to the RFA. Tibetans are treated as foreign nationals. Foreigners are not allowed to collect news without license from the Department of Information and Ministry of Information and Communication. The existing rules and regulations of Nepal regarding the process of registration of foreign media reporters provide them temporary license to collect news within the fixed parts of Nepal for certain time. The Depart of Information does not issue a single license for Tibetan journalists.

A few journalists without licence are actively engaged in journalism. Collecting news without license from international media is illegal, although there is no any record of such claims and punishment in press council of Nepal. The RFA reporters try to get license but the DOI reject their request on the ground that the state's law allows only citizenship holders to get license. Having no citizenship, Tibetans are not able to get journalist license. I have interviewed some Tibetan reporters from Nepal. The following arguments and

criticism is based on that interview.

There is no particular media which only covers the issues of Tibetans in Nepal. The Radio Free Asia (RFA) is such international media that covers those issues frequently. The RFA reports not only about Tibetan issues in Nepal but also about issues related to Tibetans anywhere else. It not only reports Tibetan issue but also covers news related to Nepal and the world. The RFA broadcasts in nine languages, Tibetan being one of them. The RFA focuses on the countries where the Governments strictly control the media and decides what its people should listen, watch and read, and deprive them of the right to information.

The security and foreign policies of Nepal focus on Tibetan media and its functions associated with the 'free Tibet" campaign. I asked a journalist whether there are any challenges in reporting Tibetan issues in Nepal. "If yes, what?" was the answer. Nepal security and police treat Tibetan media in the same manner as they treat other Tibetans, associated with the 'Free Tibet' campaign. This is a challenge on reporting the Tibetan issues in Nepal. When foreign, Nepali and Tibetan media persons cover the same event, Tibetan media persons are in a risk of getting arrested and detained. There has been incidences of the arrest and detention of Tibetan reporters while covering Tibetans protesting outside the Chinese embassay.

Tibetan journalists are sincere and aware of the principles of journalism and the ethical practice. Sticking to the standards of journalism, reporting facts accurately, fairly and in a balanced way, they give importance on reporting the Tibet issue in the context of Nepal.

They view the coverage of Nepali media regarding their issues in diverse forms. They do not generalize as there are opinion pieces: some positive and some negative. One journalist argued on my question - How do you view the Tibetan community issue in the Nepali media? I replied, "I cannot generalize and haven't done daily complete research of the coverage of Tibetan issue by the Nepali media, but sometimes some media have done extensive baseless negative portrayal of Tibetan community in Nepal. For example: the ABC has falsely reported Tibetan monasteries as training grounds of 'Free Tibet' activism. But there are some media who does coverage objectively. Then there are opinion pieces: some positive and some negative. So we cannot generalize. To observe regularly all the media in Nepal is a good research project as well."

Media is a powerful instrument for shaping a society. They believe that the Nepali press has an important role in solving the Tibetan community issue in Nepal. The coverage of the Tibetans in Nepali media are not based on the critically evaluation of the issues. Mostly the story of Tibetans protesting and

getting arrested by Nepali police get more space. On my question of the Nepali media's role in solving the Tibetan community issues in Nepal, a journalist argued in the following way:

> The coverage of Tibetan issue in Nepal media is mostly the story of Tibetans protesting and Nepali police arresting them. This is a typical media coverage of the Tibetan community in Nepal. Nothing beyond this or the reality of Tibetan issue come in the Nepali media. Many issues such as why Tibetans live in Nepal, why they are protesting, what contribution they make in Nepal, whether Tibetan refugees in Nepal is an advantage or disadvantage for Nepal, why China is helping Nepal so much, why China keeps Nepal as a top priority country, why Bhutanese refugees in Nepal are allowed to be resettled in Nepal but not giving the same privilge to the Tibetan refugees, why so many Tibetan do not have any documents to stay in Nepal and problems thereof, why many Tibetans have left Nepal for other countries,why all young Tibetans want to leave Nepal anyhow and its impact on Nepal, and why the Tibetan population decreases drastically in ten years from now. These kinds of stories are possible only through in depth, long and investigative journalism and feature stories.

They have bitter experience in most of the time when collecting news in certain occasion. They claim that Nepali police treat every Tibetan as a potential 'Free Tibet' activitist. One journalist shares his experience: "Nepal police treating every Tibetan like a potential "Free Tibet" activist. Tibetan media is treated in the same way. There were cases of Tibetan journalists getting arrested and detained while covering Tibetans protest outside the Chinese embassy. Although I didn't face such incident myself, I was close to arrest when a couple of police questioned me but was spared because of the presence of Human Right staffs monitoring the protests there."

The agenda of journalistic freedom and national interest comes side by side. In a most ideal situation, journalistic freedom is the strength and pride of any country, but it varies from nation to nation depending upon power of the nation and its foreign relations.

4. Conclusion & Recommendations

Some principal findings of this research are as follows:

- Nepali print media represents Tibetan refugee issues with priority.
- Nepali print media gives higher coverage to the Tibetan refugee issues than the Bhutanese refugees. It also gives low coverage to the

international refugee issues.

- Private media covers the analytical nature genre (editorial, photographs, interview, op-ed) in adequate numbers where as government owned media organization gives only little coverage of hard news.
- Government media organizations depend upon government sources (not using international agencies) to collect news while covering the Tibetan refugee issues but the private media use both resources.
- Most of the Tibetan refugee issues do not get more priority in Nepali papers as most of the coverage were published in page 3 and 7 of news papers in filler news form.
- Government owned media is not giving space for the Tibetan refugee issues beyond Nepal, where as private media organization gives adequate space.
- Private media organizations cover the Tibetan issues more than the government media, where as private owned media and foreign investment media cover more than solo national investment.
- There is common tendency of covering Tibetan refugee issues in Nepali media in the time of state/official visits from China and US/EU to Nepal.
- The foreign policy especially "One China Policy" is a major factor that influences the Nepali media in terms of covering the Tibetan refugee issues.
- The understanding of Tibetan issues in Nepali press is not uniform. Government media take these issues as political & international nature where as private media look at them from both political and humanitarian perspectives.
- Nepali media has a great impact on Tibetan refugee residing in Nepal. It gives more coverage on political activities of the Tibetan refugees which shadows their lifestyle problems. Their socio-economic-cultural problems which are non-political and which are not against the foreign policy of Nepal do not get due attention. The present coverage of the Nepali media shows they always engage in anti-Chinese activities.
- Most of the Nepali media people do not know anything about the 'Middle Way Policy' of the Tibetan government-in-exile.

On the basis of these findings I would like to recommend certain points which I found a better way for the durable solutions to the Tibetan cause in Nepal. My recommendation includes the responsibilities of the GON and Tibetan & international community.

Nepal is marching forward towards a gorge of two giant neighbors—China and India. Only on the basis of this research I am not going to suggest GON in cheap popular form to ratify the conventions/ protocols related to

refugees although the Supreme Court of Nepal has ordered to do so. I would like to suggest GON to do necessary homeworks and exercises as it is the issue of international concern and regional challenge and furthermore suggest to formulate certain 'domestic policy & directives' for the protection of humanitarian rights of refugees.

Nepali media needs to have a single face and understanding on the Tibetan refugee issues and need to give adequate coverage on their humanitarian problematic issues. National interest always comes first in comparison of any perspectives. In spite of covering the international political debate on the Tibetan refugee issues, the lifestyle, art, culture, socio-economic activities and the contributions of Tibetans also need to be given adequate space.

Tibetan refugees in Nepal should be aware of the law, rules and regulations of the host country. They should interconnect them to Nepali community rather than remain isolated. They themselves need to actively use Nepali media as regular audience, commentators and writers. This will help them empower in communication and bring their issues in the mainstream of Nepali media.

Everybody knows the geopolitics of Nepal. Geopolitics cannot be changed but it can minimize its hindrances. The Chinese government needs to understand the globalization, democratic norms, and the fact that Nepal cannot go against her own national interest. Nepal is against refoulment of vulnerable population. China therefore should not exert unnecessary pressure on Nepal. It would be more effective and benificial if China guards its own borders to make sure that not a single Tibetan can illegally enter the territory of Nepal.

The international agencies needs to make a concrete policy towards the refugee communities in Nepal. After the third country settlement programme was initiated, more than 60 thousand Bhutanese were resettled in different seven countries of US/EU. International communities should not put pressure on Nepal on the ground of Nepalese government's human rights violation and suppression of demonstrations. It is a fact that Nepal cannot go against her national interest and is not willing to offend China. They need to adopt a similar policy to the Tibetans as they have adopted for the Bhutanese refugees which can benefit both the Tibetan refugees and Nepalese country. China always wants Nepal's commitment to China's "One China" policy and similar implements in words and actions; she is always suspicious and blames the international community for using Nepal as playground of Tibetan cause and for trying to split Tibet from China. So, international agencies in Nepal need to make their presence noticeable and clarify their charges.

The role of the UNHCR in Nepal should be acknowledged and commended for its regular effort to eradicate the certain problems of Tibetan refugees

including other refugees. The active plan and action of the UNHCR towards Bhutanese refugees can bring a similar solution to the Tibetan refugees too. The UNHCR needs to actively work with foreign governments to promote and facilitate the third-country resettlement of the Tibetan refugees as a major instrument of refugee protection that supports to minimize the threat of statelessness.

The social responsibility of media depends upon the voice of the voiceless and betterment of the vulnerable people, Nepali citizens or Tibetan refugees. The exposure of the role of media as 'Watch Dog' rather than 'Lap Dog' will ensure public trust in the media which will help media to act independently and objectively.

References

Adhikari, Pushpa. 2010. *Ties that Bind: An Account of Nepal China Relations*. Kathmandu: Sangam Institute.

Admin. 2011. Nepal Adopts New Policy of Protection for Tibetan Refugees, http://www.savetibet.org/media-center/ict-news-reports/nepal-adopts-new-policy-protection-tibetan-refugees

Basnyat, Premsingh. 2065. *Nepalma Tibetan saranarthiharuko prabesh tatha Khampa Bidhroha*, Kathmandu: Pragati Pustak Sadan.

Bloch-Elkon, Y. 2007. "Studying the Media, Public Opinion, and Foreign Policy in International Crises: The United States and the Bosnian Crisis, 1992-1995." *The Harvard International Journal of Press/ Politics*, 12(20).

Chapagain, Kiran. (ed.) 2007. *Press Freedom One year of Loktantra.* Kathmandu: Federation of Nepali Journalist.

Deleshi, Scott H. 2011. "Rights of Refugees", *The Kathmandu Post*, November 21.

Dhabade, Manish & Harsh V. Pant. 2004. Coping with Challenges to sovereignty: Sino-Indian rivalry and Nepal's foreign Policy, Contemporary South Asia 13:2

Dhananjaya, Shree. 1959. "Tibet", *Gorkhapatra Newspaper*, March 27.

DIIR.2008. *Tibet's Journey in Exile.* Dharmashala, India: The Tibet Museum.

DIIR, 2011. *Middle Way Policy and All Related Documents.* Dharmashala, India.

Gautam, Upendra. 2011. "Nepal and China face new Cold War in the Region", www.telegraph.com

Gorkhapatra Newspaper. 1959. "Lhasamaa Golmaal Shanta Hudaichha", March 27.

_____. Tibetko sthittibaare Shree Neharuko Baktabya, March 25.

Han, Hun. 2011. The Strategies Dimension in Sino-Nepali Relations: A Chinese perspective, Unpublished Seminar paper collected in Library of Nepal China Study Centre.

Kantipur. 2011. "Saranarthi Gharfirti Annirnit" *Kantipur National Daily*, January 3.

Kantipur. 2011. "The Wworld is Bigger than India and China", *Kantipur National Daily*, December 12.

Karki, Suresh. 2012. Nepal Chin Sambandha Aytahasik Bebachana, Kathmandu: Nepal China People's Forum.

Karki,Suresh Raj. 2006. Badhiledosandharvama Nepal-Chin Sambandhara Bharat, Kathmandu, Nepal China peoples Forum.

Khanal, Sarita. 2069. Refugees problems in South Asia with Special Reference to Nepal: A Study, Kathmandu, (Seminar Paper, Collected at Nepal Law Campus/TU, Library)

Khanal, Shreebhakta, Samiksha Koirala.2065. Regarding Refugee, Pokhara: Sambad Nepal.

Kharel, P. 2010. Political Communication Media Message and Meaning, Kathmandu: Sangam Institute.

Kharel, P. 2009. "Role of the Media, Public and Interest Groups to Promote National Interest". In *A Shrestha and P Adhikari.ed.* 2009. Nepal's National Interest. Kathmandu; Sangam Institute. pp. 56-108.

Lama, Roshan. 2011.Tibetans in Nepal and the three political Rhetorics,Web. http://www.darjeelingtimes.com/options/political/1691-tibetans-in-nepal-and-the-three-political-rhetorics.html.

Lostumbo, Rachel.1995.Tibetan refugees in Nepal: From Established Settlements to forcible repatriation, USA: Georgetown Immigration Law Journal.

Luintel, Gunaraj. 2011. Nepalmathiko Dabab: Paisa Jutaune Rananiti, Annapurna Post, November 20.

Mainali, Sujit. 2065. "Dashin Asiamaa Bharitya Jaal Atanka", Kathmandu: Mulyankan Monthly.

Malla, Shashi P.B.B. 2011. "American/Indian Interests and Tibetan refugees in Nepal." Web.20 December 2009. <http://www.peoplesreview.com.np/index.php?view=article>.

Manandhar, Triratna. 2041. *Nepal Bhot Bibad* (B.S. 1939-41), Kathmandu: Nepal & Asian Studies Centre.

McQuails, Denis. 2007. *MuQuali's Mass Communication Theory*, New Delhi: Vistaar Publications.

Muni, S.D.1973.Foreign policy of Nepal, Delhi: National Publishing House.

Malek, A. & Weigand, K.E., 1997. *News Media & Foreign Policy Relations: A Multifaceted Perspective*. Norwood, New Jersey: Ablex Publishing Corporation.

NUCRA, Brochure. 2003. *Refugees in Nepal: A short Glimpse*, Kathmandu: GON/Ministry of Home Affairs.

Noelle, Neumann. (1985). "The Spiral of Silence: A Response." In K.R. Sanders, L.L. Kaid, and D.D. Nimmo, eds., Political Communication Yearbook, 1984.Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.

_____. (1984). *The Spiral of Silence: Our Social Skin*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

_____. (1973). "Return to the Concept of the powerful Mass Media." Studies of the Broadcasting.

Panta, Prem R. 2012. *Social Science Research and the Thesis Writing*, Kathmandu: Buddha Academic Publishers and Distributers Pvt. Ltd.

Pathak, Sudip, Malla K. Sundar. Statement. "Tibet Issues: A Nepali Perspective." Date not identified.

Pathak, Sudip. 2067. "Nepalma Raheaka Saranarthi ra Nepal", Seminar paper present at Hotel Sahansa, Kathmandu at 2067 Mangsir 3.

Prajapati, Ujjwal. 2011. Influence of Foreign Policy on Nepali Press: A Case Study on Coverage of Tibetan Protest in Nepal, Master's thesis in Media Studies, Department of Media and Communication, University of Oslo.

Sigdel, Bishow.2010. Nepal Tibet sambandhako euta swornim kaalkhanda, Seminar paper (Collection with writer).

Tibet Justice Centre Report (TJC).2002. *Tibet's Stateless Nationals: Tibetan Refugees in Nepal*. Berkeley USA: Tibet Justice Centre.

Tibetan Refugee Welfare Office (TRWO). 2011. Memorandum, Kathmandu: Tibetan Refugee Welfare Office.

Tibetan Refugee Welfare Office, Statement. October 2003. Nepal and Tibetan Refugees, TRWO, Brochure. 1999. State of Tibetan refugees in Nepal, Kathmandu.

Upreti, Tanka.2010. *Sanchar Anusandhan Padhatti ra Avhyaas*. Lalitpur: Sajha Prakashan.

Uprety, Prem R. 1980. Nepal-Tibet Relations 1850-1930: Years of Hopes Challenges and Frustrations, Kathmandu: Puga Nara.

Vaidya, T. R, B. R. Bajracharya .1996. *Nepal: International Perspectives*, New Delhi: Anamol Publications Pvt. Ltd.

Wimmer, Roger D. & Joseph R. Dominick. 2005. *Mass Media Research An Introduction*. USA: Holy J. Allen.

Tibetan Refugee Issues in Nepali Press

TIBET

By
Subash Acharya

Offprinted from
THE TIBET JOURNAL, Vol. XLIII, No. 2
AUTUMN/WINTER 2018